



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2006

Final Defendant in Human-Trafficking Conspiracy
Sentenced at Top End of Guideline Range

FARGO - United States Attorney Drew Wrigley announced that **Ya Cao**, of Mc Kinney, Texas, was sentenced on June 14, 2006, to 21 months' imprisonment for her participation in a human-trafficking conspiracy responsible for trafficking approximately 6,000 illegal alien workers. **Cao** received the maximum penalty within the U. S. Sentencing Guidelines. During the sentencing hearing United States District Court Judge Ralph R. Erickson stated that this criminal enterprise was an especially "destructive conspiracy," characterizing the criminal activity as modern-day "slave labor" and treating the illegal immigrant workers "like animals."

Evidence at the trial in September of 2005 for co-defendant **Shan Wei Yu** showed that during the five-year conspiracy **Yu**, along with **Cao** and their co-conspirators, transported approximately 6,000 illegal alien workers to Asian restaurants throughout the Midwest, which included over 40 orders and deliveries of workers to Asian restaurants in North Dakota. As part of the recruitment process the conspiracy would present prospective aliens workers with contracts that stated the worker's monthly salary, as well as expenses owed by the worker, which the worker would have to reimburse to the employer after receiving the first month's salary. After the alien workers were recruited for employment they would be transported across state lines and delivered to the restaurant employer. Upon delivery the restaurant employers would advance money to the driver to pay the finder's fee and

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the transportation costs, with the understanding that the amount would be deducted from the alien worker's first paycheck. The incidents occurred between March of 2000 and January of 2005.

During **Yu's** sentencing hearing in December of 2005 Judge Erickson granted the United States' motion to depart upward on the Sentencing Guidelines and sentenced Yu to nine years in prison. Judge Erickson stated that **Yu** was dealing in "human tragedy" and that **Yu, Cao**, and others had "oppressed other human beings in large numbers" for money.

"This sentencing concludes this phase of a sordid criminal enterprise," said U. S. Attorney Drew Wrigley. "The first phase was arresting and prosecuting the two restaurant owners who were harboring illegal workers for a financial gain. Those prosecutions lead to the supplier of those illegal workers, which turned out to be one of the largest on record human smuggling rings in terms of workers smuggled."

Six additional co-defendants plead guilty to the conspiracy and were sentenced to up to eight months' imprisonment.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Border Patrol.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Nick Chase.

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